

PRESS RELEASE

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Missouri Senate

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Weekly Capitol Report

JEFFERSON CITY – Last year I wrote a column about how a bill becomes a law and received many positive comments. I thought now might be a good time to revisit how the legislative process works in Missouri.

No law is passed in the Missouri Legislature without creating a bill. Bills may originate in either house and are designated as Senate Bills or House Bills, depending on the house in which they originate.

New legislation can be pre-filed beginning December 1. They can also be filed up to 60 days after the beginning of a new session.

Bills may be written by a legislator or drafted by staff at the request of a senator or representative. When introduced, a bill is assigned a number and then goes on our calendar for second reading and assignment to permanent committees by the leadership. Examples of these committees are Ways and Means or Appropriations.

A public hearing before the committee to which a bill is assigned is the next step in the legislative process. Except in the case of some unusually controversial, complex or lengthy bills, its sponsor presents the bill. Supporters and opponents of the issue speak in this same hearing.

When hearings are concluded, the committee meets to vote and makes its recommendations. The committee may: (1) vote the bill "do pass"; (2) Recommend passage with committee amendments, which are attached to the bill; (3) Return the bill without recommendation; (4) Substitute in lieu of the original bill a new bill to be known as a committee substitute; (5) Report the bill with a recommendation that it "do not pass" or (6) Make no report at all.

If a bill is reported favorably out of committee or a substitute is recommended, it is placed on the "perfection calendar" and then it is debated on the floor of the originating house. If the committee recommends a substitute or if committee amendments are attached to the bill, they are first presented, debated and voted upon.

Other members can then propose further amendments with their changes designated as House or Senate amendments to differentiate from the committee amendments. When all amendments have been considered, a motion is made to declare the bill perfected. Perfection is usually voted on a voice vote but on the request of five members, a roll call shall be taken. If a majority of members vote to perfect, the bill is reprinted in its original or amended form.

After the perfection process, the bill goes back to the floor for third reading and final passage. Any member may speak for or against the bill, but may not change it. The vote is then taken with a constitutional majority of the elected members (18 in the Senate and 82 in the House) required for final passage.

The other house then picks the bill up and follows the same process. If there are amendments placed on the bill, it is only with the approval of the original house. If there is not approval, a conference committee is formed to reach an agreement. After a compromise is reached, it goes back to the houses to "truly agreed to and finally passed". If the conference committee rejects it, it may be returned to the same or a newly appointed committee for further conferences.

Upon final passage, a bill is ordered enrolled. It is typed in its finally approved form, printed and the bills are closely compared and proofed for errors.

The House Speaker and Senate President Pro Tem then signs bills truly agreed to and finally passed in their typed form in open session. At the time of signing, any member may file written objections that are sent with the bill to the governor.

The governor has 15 days to act on a bill if it is sent to him during the legislative session. If he signs a bill, it becomes law. If he ignores the bill within the time limits prescribed by the constitution it becomes law in the same manner as if the governor had signed it.

If the governor vetoes a bill, it is returned to the house of origin with his objections. A two-thirds vote by members of both houses is required to override a governor's veto. We saw this happen twice last year.

The State Constitution provides that all laws passed take effect 90 days after the end of session, except appropriations bills and emergency bills whose effective dates are prescribed in the bill.

The secretary of state then presents all passed laws in an annual volume of “Laws of Missouri”. This volume is available to all elected officials and the general public.

So there you have it. As you can see, it takes a lot of time and conversation for a bill to become a law. There are over 700 bills being considered in the Senate alone this year, not many of those will make it through to the Governor’s desk.

What do you think? If you haven’t received our constituent survey in your local newspaper, visit my Senate website at www.senate.state.mo.us/04info/members/mem20.htm where it is available for you to fill out online. Your thoughts and opinions help me form my decisions in the legislature. I look forward to hearing from you. I will be releasing the results of the survey around mid March.

Of course, you can always call our office toll free at 1.866.242.0810 or email to dan_clemens@senate.state.mo.us.

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